

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SSM-03 ACDA-07
IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /080 W
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R 101524Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2132
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1604

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR SY LE IS
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: ADF PRESENCE IN NABATIYAH AREA

1. SUMMARY:

ACCORDING ONE WELL-PLACED LOCAL SOURCE, ASAD KNEW WHEN HE ORDERED DEPLOYMENT OF SYRIAN FORCES TO NABATIYAH AREA IN JANUARY THAT THIS WOULD EXCITE STRONG ISRAELI REACTION. PRESIDENT TOOK DECISION NONETHELESS BECAUSE HE THOUGHT THERE WAS STRONG POSSIBILITY OF REJECTIONIST FORCES MOUNTING INCIDENT AGAINST ISRAELI TARGET BRINGING ON ISRAELI COUNTER ACTION WHICH WOULD HIT SYRIAN FORCES AS WELL AS REJECTIONISTS.

END SUMMARY

2. LOCAL BUSINESS MAN, AHMAD AL-ADLY, ENJOYS CLOSE CONTACT WITH SYRIAN COLONEL MOHAMMAD AL-KHOULI, SYRIAN REP TO QUADRAPARTITE CONFERENCE AND HAS OFTEN PROVEN TO BE A GOOD SOURCE ABOUT THINKING IN THE PRESIDENCY AND
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BAATH PARTY COMMAND CIRCLES. ON MARCH 10 HE REVIEWED WITH AMBASSADOR BACKGROUND OF SYRIAN PLANNING FOR JANUARY 23 DEPLOYMENT OF ADF FORCES INTO NABATIYAH, AS HE HIMSELF HAS RECENTLY PIECED IT TOGETHER. HE SAID THAT PRESIDENT AND ADVISORS HAD BEEN INCREASINGLY CONCERNED BY THE GROWING STRENGTH OF REJECTIONIST FORCES IN THE NABATIYAH AREA AND FORESAW THEIR ATTEMPTING AN INCIDENT

AGAINST ISRAELI BORDER TARGET, PERHAPS USING ARTILLERY. SYRIANS BELIEVED THAT ISRAELIS WOULD LIKELY RETALIATE NOT ONLY AGAINST REJECTIONISTS BUT AGAINST SYRIAN CONCENTRATIONS FURTHER TO THE NORTH, WERE SUCH INCIDENT TO TAKE PLACE.

3. ACCORDING TO ADLY, ASAD WAS ALSO AWARE THAT LATE JANUARY, THE EVE OF THE GOI LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE, WAS NOT AN IDEAL TIME TO PRESENT THE ISRAELI LEADERSHIP WITH WHAT IT WOULD SEE AS A CHALLENGE TO ITS MACHISMO. BUT PRESIDENT'S DESIRE TO AVOID BEING HUMILIATED BY A POSSIBLE ISRAELI ATTACK ON SYRIAN UNITS AND BEING FORCED HIMSELF IN COUNTERACTION LED HIM TO TAKE THIS RISK. AS HE WATCHED ISRAELI REACTIONS IN THEIR PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND THE MOUNTING LEVEL OF TENSION, THE PRESIDENT TOOK CHARACTERISTICALLY PRAGMATIC STAND AND WITHDREW HIS FORCES NORTHWARD. THE WHOL AFAFAIR WAS MANAGED SO THAT SARKIS HAD TO BEAR THE POLITICAL EMBARRASSMENT. ADLY SAID HE WAS NOT AWARE OF HOW CLOSELY SYRIA HAD COORDINATED ITS ORIGINAL DECISION RE DEPLOYMENT WITH SARKIS. HE SPECULATED HOWEVER, THAT SARKIS WOULD OPPOSE A RENEWED SOUTHERN DEPLOYMENT UNLESS ASSURED IT HAD PRIOR ISRAELI AGREEMENT.

4. IN ADLY'S OPINION, RECENT CLASHES BETWEEN SAIQA AND REJECTIONISTS IN NABATIYAH TENDED TO PROVE THAT ASAD'S ORIGINAL CONCERN WAS WELL FOUNDED; THE REJECTIONISTS WERE SPOILING FOR A MAJOR FIGHT. HE ASSUMED THAT THE SAIQA FORCES INVOLVED IN THE LATEST FIGHTING INCLUDED A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF SYRIAN REGULARS DRESSED IN SAIQA UNIFORMS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT WAS CURIOUS ASAD HAD NOT ATTEMPTED TO USE "PURELY" SAIQA FORCES IN THE JANUARY 23
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DEPLOYMENT. HE SAID HE COULD ONLY ASSUME THAT THE PRESIDENT FELT THE REJECTIONISTS WOULD BACK AWAY MORE QUICKLY FROM A CONFRONTATION WITH SYRIAN REGULARS.

5. COMMENT:

ADLY'S ACCOUNT IS THE FIRST READING AVAILABLE TO US WHICH GIVES EVEN A PARTIALLY PLAUSIBLE INTERPRETATION TO SYRIA'S APPARENT RASHNESS IN DEPLOYING ITS FORCES SOUTHWARDS IN JANUARY IN THE FACE OF A PREDICTABLY STRONG ISRAELI REACTION.
MURPHY

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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
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